

veterans in rural areas. First, due to the closure and consolidation of veterans health care facilities in Nebraska, veterans in rural areas frequently travel several hours simply to receive the basic services for which they are entitled and are eligible. As a result of this travel, they must incur transportation costs such as overnight accommodations which other veterans are not expected to incur for the same services. Furthermore, requiring elderly and frequently sick or incapacitated veterans to travel on Interstate 80 or other very busy roads and highways is not only unfair to them, but also places them and other citizens at risk.

The severity of this problem was brought to this Member's attention by a January 2002 Lincoln Journal Star article featuring one Nebraska veteran who served in the Navy during World War II. Three years after he was diagnosed with several diseases, his wife of 49 years could no longer care for her husband. She said that putting her husband in a nursing home was the hardest thing she had ever had to do in her entire life. Medicare and a private insurance supplement cover doctors' expenses, and the couple uses their retirement savings to pay for the \$4,000 monthly nursing home cost.

However, additional expenses include \$1,000 a month to cover the cost of seven prescription drugs that this veteran must take to stay alive. Although he qualifies for a prescription drug benefit through the VA, in order to obtain this benefit, the drugs must be prescribed by a VA doctor at VA-approved facilities. As a result, this veteran must travel 50 miles every 6 months in order to have prescriptions reauthorized.

Now, because that veteran is 74 years old, confined to a wheelchair, suffers serious blood clots which prohibit him from traveling, this 50-mile trip often proves to be impossible.

With the struggles of this veteran and many others in mind, this Member expresses his strongest support for H.R. 2379, the Rural Veterans Access to Health Care Act for 2003. Indeed, this Member is a proud cosponsor of this measure, which was introduced by my colleague, the distinguished gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE). He is to be commended for crafting this legislation, which addresses a critical problem about which our constituents in Nebraska are increasingly expressing their concerns.

Through H.R. 2379, no less than 5 percent of the total appropriated funds for health care would be dedicated to address veterans health care access problems in highly rural or geographically remote areas. As amended by this bill, highly rural or geographically remote would apply to areas in which the veterans have to drive at least 60 minutes or more to a VA health care facility. Each Veterans Integrated Service Network, that is called VISN, director would receive an equal level of funding from this account and then have the

discretion to address rural access issues as best fit each VISN. If a VISN would be unable to use all of these funds from this account, the VISN would not be allowed to retain unused funds. Instead, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs would then have the opportunity to reallocate those funds to other VISNs closely nearby or anywhere that is rural and geographically remote.

All Members of Congress should agree that the VA must provide adequate services and facilities for veterans all across the country regardless of where they live, in sparsely settled areas with resultant low-usage numbers for VA hospitals. There must be at least a basic level of acceptable national infrastructure of facilities, medical personnel and services for meeting the very real medical needs faced by our veterans wherever they live. There must be a threshold funding level for VA medical services in each State and region before any per capital funding level is applied.

Furthermore, I support H.R. 3777, the Healthy Vets Act of 2004. This Member is also a cosponsor of this legislation, introduced by our colleague, the distinguished gentleman from Colorado (Mr. MCINNIS).

This measure would allow those veterans in rural areas which are geographically inaccessible to the nearest VA medical facility to enter into contracts with community health care providers on a fee basis to receive primary health care in their own communities. This authority would allow rural veterans to receive preventive regular medical attention without being forced to travel what is too often a prohibitive distance to seek such care.

In spite of the fact that each Congress sets a new record on the amount of appropriation for veterans health care, there have been cutbacks in the access veterans in rural areas have to adequate health care, while there have been advances in other geographic areas. The health care needs of our military veterans must be met to the fullest extent possible. Veterans served in our armed services to protect our freedom and our way of life. As they served our Nation at a time of need, the Federal Government must remember them in their time of need. The debt of gratitude the people the U.S. owe to our veterans surely means we should assist the veterans wherever that need exists.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, this Member remains committed, I would say, to ensuring that Nebraska veterans receive the benefits they deserve, benefits they had expected and which the American people said they want to deliver. I urge support of H.R. 2379 and H.R. 3777.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PETERSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania addressed the House. His remarks will ap-

pear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### JOBS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, the President flew Air Force 1 to Cleveland today to campaign in my home State of Ohio, talking with 700 or 800 female small business owners. While the President came and talked about small business and job creation and all that he wants to do in a State which has suffered the worst or second worst job loss in the country, the President, at the same time, and this Congress today, this House today considered this legislation, is slashing \$94 million from a loan program essential to small business development. He has shrunk the size of the Small Business Administration.

This President basically treats small business one way, with very little assistance, and large businesses, like the Halliburton Corporation, which still pays Vice President CHENEY \$3,000 a month from their payroll, the Halliburton Corporation, very differently.

The President really does not get it when he comes to a State like Ohio, a State where we have lost 166,000 manufacturing jobs since he took office, 300,000 jobs overall since he took office; one out of six manufacturing jobs in the State of Ohio has simply disappeared in the last 3 years. The President's solution to all of this is continued tax cuts for the most privileged people, with the hope that some of that money will trickle down and create jobs.

The other solution the President has is more trade agreements, NAFTA-like trade agreements, that ship jobs overseas; that hemorrhage jobs to Mexico, to China, and all over the world. He continues, as he campaigned in Cleveland today to those small business owners, he continued to say more tax cuts for the most privileged and more trade agreements. And, clearly, for 3 years that has not worked. One-sixth of our manufacturing base is gone in Ohio and about one seventh of the manufacturing base around the country.

That was really brought home to me last week. I was in Akron, Ohio, speaking to a group of owners of machine shops, about 60 people. And a gentleman came forward and he dropped a stack of brochures, leaflets like this. He dropped about four times this many, and he said this is what I get in about a month in the mail from companies around the country. And these stacks of brochures, these stacks of leaflets are auction notices for companies going out of business. Every one of these represents a company that is going out of business or is downsizing as a result of the Bush recession.

Here is one plant. Closed, everything sells. Here is another one from Mansfield, Ohio. Two complete stamping